



JANUARY 15, 2008

FOREIGN POLICY

President Bush pays a state visit to Saudi Arabia

President George W. Bush arrived in Riyadh January 14 for a three-day official visit to Saudi Arabia. It is President Bush's first state visit to Saudi Arabia, and the first by a current US president since Bill Clinton met with King Fahd in 1994.

After a red-carpet welcome at the airport from King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, the King and President Bush held official talks at the royal palace in Riyadh. They discussed regional issues, in particular the Middle East peace process and international efforts to restart talks in light of the November 2007 peace conference in Annapolis. They also reviewed the situation in Iraq, ways to boost bilateral cooperation, and international counterterrorism efforts. King Abdullah reiterated his call for the establishment of an international counterterrorism center under the aegis of the United Nations.

King Abdullah hosted two dinners for President Bush. During the first, on January 14, the King awarded President Bush the King Abdulaziz Medal, an honor that is given to world leaders and heads of state. On January 15, the King also hosted the president at the royal ranch in Jenadriyah, where the two leaders continued their official talks.

Visit by President Sarkozy boosts Saudi-French cooperation

French President Nicolas Sarkozy also paid a state visit to Saudi Arabia this week, from January 13-14. The two leaders reviewed key international issues, including the situation in Palestine, the Middle East peace process, the political crisis in Lebanon and the situation in Iraq. They also discussed ways of boosting cooperation between Saudi Arabia and France.

Four bilateral agreements were signed during the visit. One dealt with cooperation between the foreign ministries of both countries. A second related to training and rehabilitation, focusing on areas where Saudi youth could receive training in France. A third agreement dealt with higher education and scientific research, while a fourth focused on the energy sector.

Foreign minister calls for restraint in the Arabian Gulf

On January 9, Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal commented on the recent clash between Iran and the United States in the Arabian Gulf. He urged all

parties to exercise restraint, noting that irresponsible acts endanger the region and do not foster stability. The prince made the remarks during a press conference with Canadian Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier.

Also this week, Prince Saud urged Syria to use its influence in Lebanon to persuade parties to accept an Arab League initiative to end the political crisis there.

"What is demanded is that Syria convinces those listening to it in Lebanon on this solution as it is an urgent solution," the prince said in a January 14 press conference with French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner.

SAUDI ARABIA

King Faisal International Prize winners for 2008 announced

The winners of the King Faisal International Prize for this year were announced this week. King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz won the prize for Service to Islam recognition of his service to Muslims both in Saudi Arabia and abroad.

Other winners include: Professor Rüdiger Wehner of Germany (Science), Professors Donald D. Trunkey and Basil A. Pruitt, Jr. of the United States (Medicine), and Professor Ahmad Matloob Al-Nasiri of Iraq and Professor Muhammed Rashad Al-Hamzawi of Tunisia (Arabic Language and Literature). The prize for Islamic Studies was not awarded this year due to a lack of merit among nominees.

First Middle East Knowledge Economy Conference held in Jeddah

The 1st Middle East Knowledge Economy Conference and Exhibition was held at the Jeddah Hilton January 12-13.

The two-day event, titled "Towards a Knowledge Economy," was organized by the Arabian Knowledge Economy Association (AKEA). It was actively supported by Makkah Governor Prince Khalid Al-Faisal and held in collaboration with the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Al-Aghar Group think tank. The conference is expected to be held annually.

In inaugural remarks at the conference, Prince Khalid expressed the hope that the event would boost ongoing efforts to promote knowledge-based economies in the Arab and Islamic world. The prince noted that becoming part of the new world order was no longer a choice but a necessity.

